

INTERPRETATION

Prehistoric interpretation

Surviving prehistoric artifacts on this site were sparse. In unit 19, considerable prehistoric activity was evident, but the remains were disturbed. There, as elsewhere, fire-broken rocks and debitage lay in a lower topsoil horizon in what appeared to be a disturbed but recognizable context. The deposit in unit 19, with two pieces of Wolfe Neck pottery, an intact knife, and many fire-broken rocks, could be interpreted as lying on the periphery of a larger site, had it been encountered in a less intensive survey. This may in fact have been the case at Mudstone Branch, but the putative larger site was destroyed by a farmyard, a highway cut, cultivation, and a borrow pit.

Several writers have suggested that sites like this would have supported seasonal micro-band settlement, at least during the Middle Woodland period (Gardner 1982, 20). The presence of hearths and a few potsherds indicate that such a site could have existed here.

Although there are few artifacts and no diagnostic features to support the seasonal micro-band settlement hypothesis, the collection from this site is consistent with the large number of culturally "unidentified" sites described by Custer and Galasso (1983) in similar geographical situations nearby. Chips and flakes from the site include quartzite(85.05%), quartz(1.03%), and cryptocrystalline silicates(13.92%). Utilized chips and flakes and small tools are absent, which tends to militate against interpreting this as a processing site.

Because the south-facing slope and the slope facing the freshwater marsh have been dug away, the most attractive places for a prehistoric settlement are gone. The combination of high ground, a stream confluence, and a marsh would have been a powerful inducement for prehistoric settlement.

In spite of several intensive searches under differing conditions, the cultivated field yielded only one broken biface, and no surface concentrations of stone chips. Therefore, the only conclusive evidence points to small, ephemeral, procurement activities during prehistory.

Discussion relative to research design

Excavation confirmed the investigators' initial hypotheses about changing land-use patterns on the site from circa 1865 to circa 1970. However, the evidences of these changes were not as clear-cut as one might have wished.

CEREMONIAL SPACE: The space around the original front door remained relatively inviolate throughout the history of the house. Even after the garage was built to the northeast, very close to the front door, there was no evidence that the immediate front yard ever completely lost its ceremonial cachet.

DOMESTIC SPACE: Former residents of the house made a special point to remark that the house had two back doors, on opposite sides of the rear ell. Two doors in the rear of the house are commonplace in Delaware houses, but only one usually is regarded as "the" functional back door. The door functioning as the back door is the center of the domestic space and a focus of family activities. A perception that two doors shared this function is a significant clue to the dislocations that took place.

PRODUCTIVE SPACE: Very few artifacts could be clearly associated with farm production activity. Category 39, stable and barn, was absent entirely. This is strange as the site was certainly occupied during the period of horse powered machinery. Also few recognizable pieces of agricultural machinery were found. Unit 7 contained a harrow point, and Unit 5 contained a rivet of a type often found on tractor or on a wagon body. Unit 11 contained a cut iron spike, which is hardly diagnostic. Other units contained unidentifiable pieces of cast or wrought iron which might have been pieces of farm machinery - but just as easily might have been pieces of other types of tools. Likewise, wire, which was found in units 1, 3, 7, 9, and 17, could not be considered diagnostic of productive activity because it is a ubiquitous fix-all in American households.

The absence of any horse furniture at all suggests that the barn and work area of the period of horse powered equipment either were located well off the site, or were abandoned early and subsequently destroyed by the gravel pit, the road, or both.

Automotive material, some of which probably represented fragments of farm machinery, was concentrated around the house mound in the vicinity of the driveway, and near the standing garage/barn. None of this material appeared in enough of a concentration or in enough quantity to permit valid statistical analysis and comparison.

The best clues to the location of productive space come from the map of the McKee division (frontispiece) and from living memory. The informants' recollections of outbuildings and a kitchen garden to the east of the house and a drying shed to the north in the present field corroborate the 1908 plat. That shows two outbuildings to the east and one to the north of the house. Thus, the farm's productive space, such as it can be defined at all, lay mostly on the side of the house away from McKee Road since at least the early years of the present century.

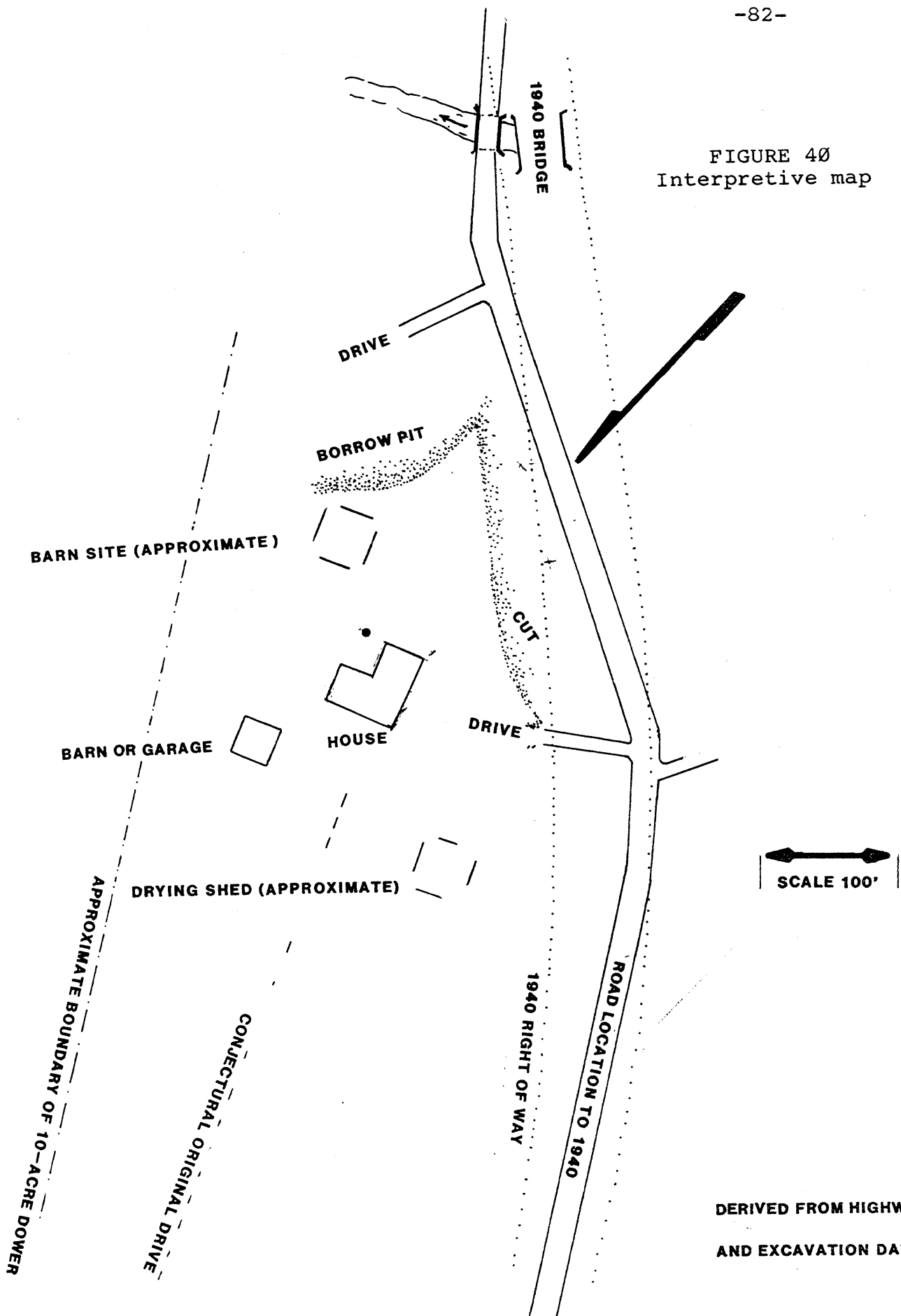
Limitations or inadequacies of available data

The excavated units were sufficient for the immediate purpose, which was to determine the site's eligibility for listing in the National Register. They were not, however, sufficient to fully interpret the site's internal geography and changes through time. More research is needed into farmyard subdivision and the impact of changed transportation routes on families' habits.

Had the investigation been aimed at explication of status, disposal habits, and architecture, it would have been necessary to concentrate on trash pits, privies, and foundations. In the present study, such features would have been a distraction rather than a help.

Despite the above caveats, and despite the problems in determining the location of productive space, it is possible to make general statements about the organization of the yard, which was an objective of the project.

FIGURE 40
Interpretive map



DERIVED FROM HIGHWAY PLANS
AND EXCAVATION DATA

FIGURE 41
Artifact illustrations

Notable artifacts, drawn actual size, left to right:

1. Leg of a cast-iron pot: ER 19B

The foot is rust-free, indicating that the pot had been used over an open fire, which causes rust-inhibiting scale to form where the iron has been exposed to high heat for long terms, as would occur in hot embers. Small legged pots for use over open cooking fires are not commonly found on sites dating from the period after introduction of cooking stoves, early in the nineteenth century. Blue shell-edged pearlware, a ceramic type that also is characteristic of the first half of the nineteenth century, was found in small quantities on the site. These objects, clearly older in form than the period of the house, may represent heirlooms or scattered artifacts from the earlier house site, which remains unidentified.

2. Prehistoric knife: ER 19B

This chert implement is reddened by exposure to heat, and has been reworked. The cutting edge is finely retouched.

3. Prehistoric potsherd: ER 19C

This sherd of tan-colored pottery was "tempered" by inclusion of tiny pebbles, two of which may be seen on the broken edge at the bottom of the drawing. The surface pattern was formed by impressing the outside of the pot with a coarse woven material.

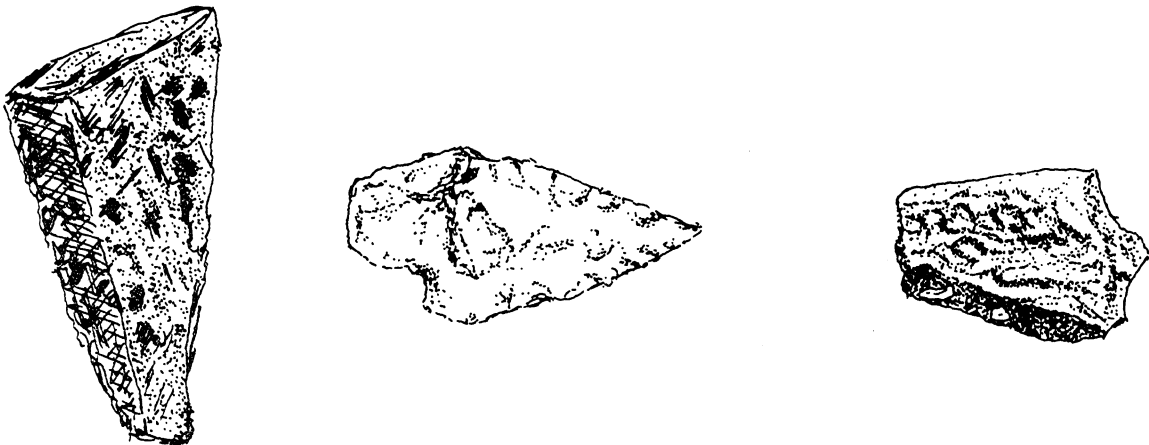


TABLE 3
Tabulation of selected artifact categories
Mudstone Branch site

ER Group No.	Kitchen Group		Architectural Group		Prehistoric Group			
		all	wire nails	cut nails	all	quartz chips	quartzite chips	cryptocrystalline silicate chips
1								
1A	3	2	2					
1B	4	3		3				
1C		1						
1D	1	1						
1E								
1F	11	32	5	13	7		7	
1G	2	7	2	2	11		7	2
1H	1							
1J	1				1		1	
1K	1	1		1				
1L		1						
1M					2			
1N								
1O								
1P					3		1	2
1Q		1		1				
2	1	1						
2A	5	4	1					
2B	2							
2C								
2D								
2E								
2F	14	19	4	4				
3*								
4	2	3						
4A	3	4	1	1	5		2	1
4B	1				14		13	1
5	4	2						
5A		11	1	10				
5B								
6	4	37	12	20	3		3	
6A	15	6	3	2				
6B		3		3				

* Unit 3 contained no artifacts in these categories

TABLE 3
(continued)

Kitchen ER Group No.	Architectural Group			Prehistoric Group			
	all	wire nails	cut nails	all	quartz chips	quartzite chips	cryptocrystalline silicate chips
7	116	10	1	3	1	1	
7A	28	37	2	29	8		1
7B							
7C		2					
7D	11	7	1	6	1		1
8	3	2		2			
8A	1	6		5	3		
8B					1		
9	2	5	2	1	1		1
10	1	1					
10A		1			3		3
10B							
10C							
11							
11A	1				1		1
11B		1		1			
11C		1		1			
11D	1						
12	1	3		2			
12A	5	2		1	2		1
12B		4		4			
12C		2		2			
12D					1		
12E							
13		2	1	1			
13A	1	1		1	8	6	2
13B	1	1			35	22	4
13C		2		2			
14	2				1		
15							
15A	2						
15B	3	3	2	1	1		1
15C	4	19	5	12	2		
15D	2	1		1			
15E		4		4			
15F	2	8		8			
15G		7		7			
15H		2					
15J							

TABLE 3
(continued)

Kitchen		Architectural			Prehistoric Group				
ER Group					quartz	quartzite	cryptocrystalline		
No.		all	wire	cut	all	chips	chips	silicate chips	
			nails	nails					
=====									
16	1				1				
16A	2	3		3	4	1		3	
16B					2			2	
16C					5			2	
17	4	1			1			1	
17A		10	1	9					
17B									
17C		1		1					
17D	1								
18									
18A									
18B	5	18	1	7					
18C									
18D	4	10	4	1					
18E									
18F									
19	9	4	1	2					
19A	55	13	4	8	22		22		
19B	52	10	3	3	46		44		
19C	6				96		35		
19D	6	2	1		2				
20	3	4		4					
20A	7	7		4	1	1	---	---	
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	417	359	53	211	296	2	165	27	